DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 253 361 RC 015 065

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TITLE A Culture Based Needs Assessment.
INSTITUTION Red School House, St. Paul, Minn.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (ED), Washington, DC. Indian Education Programs.
PUB DATE 80
GRANT G007-802949
NOTE 33p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS American Indian Education; *American Indians; Community; *Community Cooperation; Community Involvement; Community Responsibility; *Community Role; *Community Surveys; *Needs Assessment; Objectives

ABSTRACT

The booklet, developed at Red School House for Indian communities, demonstrates visually in a cultural context the series of actions constitute a needs assessment. The illustrated text tells the story of a traditional community that is in need of food for the survival of its people. The question of how to cross the river to see if food is plentiful is proposed to the community members. After a lengthy discussion among the community members and dissatisfaction with a professional's advice from outside the community, it is decided that a needs assessment survey should be conducted. The community decides to build a canoe after conducting the survey using the following procedure: designing a questionnaire that reflects the culture, values, customs and beliefs of the people it is designed for; passing around the questionnaire to all the people; taking votes from everyone; gathering the responses and tabulating them; communicating the results (needs, objectives and goals) to the community members; as a group deciding how to act to obtain the objective; and finding people in the community with skills and background to help fulfill the objective. (ERB)

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Grant Number G007-802949, Title IV, Part B, Subpart C of the Indian Education Act.

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Grateful acknowledgement to
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PREFACE

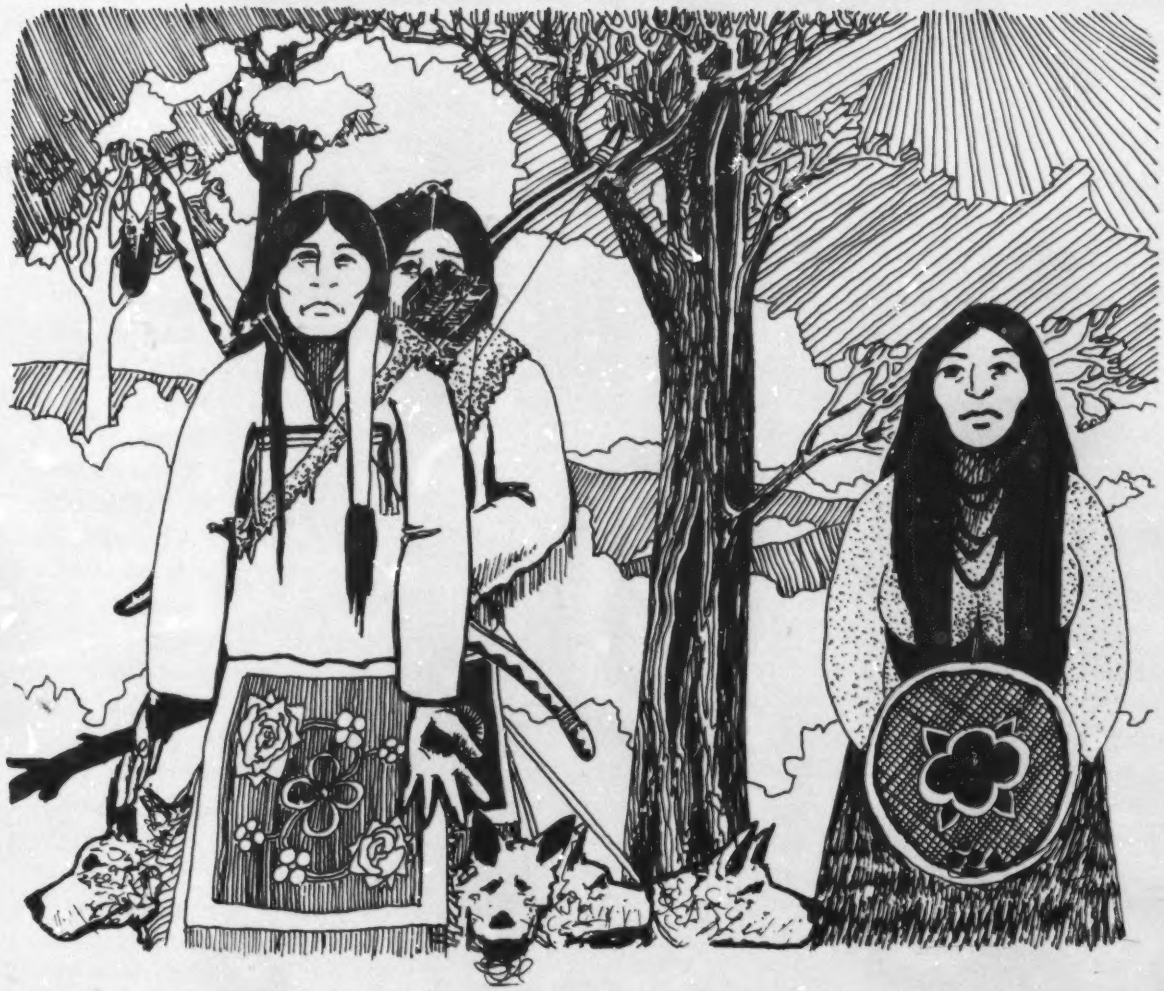
Since the beginning of public education in the United States the philosophy of instruction has reflected and emphasized European values, culture, and customs. In the case of the Indian child, as with other children having different cultural traditions and world-views, public education has historically imposed the majority cultural perspective. The efforts of such education have taken their toll on most all people of color. But we feel it has been inordinately tragic for our people. No other ethnic group in the nation has been the target of a concerted official campaign to annihilate its cultural heritage using education as its vehicle.

At the Red School House we work toward developing the student as a whole and complete person bridging the gap between living in a modern, complex world and keeping traditions and culture alive. Since the means to accomplish this cannot be found in any conventional curriculum, we must create our own - a culture-based curriculum. Activities and coursework at the Red School House are culture-based to facilitate the learning of skills needed to function in daily interaction while at the same time stressing the positive influence of tradition. Spelling is still spelling. Math is still math. It is how we present the subjects - the delivery system - that is important. As an example, a lesson in geometry becomes culture based when we define a circle as a drum or a sweatlodge. The division of the whole into four components, like the four seasons on Mother Earth, helps us to realize the whole 360 degrees. The four 90 degree portions flow together into one phenomena, the solar year. The sun calendars across the continent recorded the changes of the cycle with unerring accuracy.

The planning of a culture based curriculum must incorporate the culture, values, customs, and beliefs of the community to be served. We feel that it is imperative that the family unit as a whole be involved in the development of an educational program that is to serve students at Red School House.

This is done through a "needs assessment". The process presented in this publication was developed at Red School House to visually demonstrate to our community in a cultural context the series of actions that constitute a needs assessment. We feel that this approach is one which our people will participate in actively.

The following presentation is about a traditional community describing the experiences that lead to determining what their needs are, and the best way in which to meet those needs. In other words, they determine for themselves what is best for them and collectively decide the best methods to use.



"There is no game left in these hills around here. We went five days in each direction and saw nothing."

Ah mah jee wayk' and Wah bee goo nees' talked together as they worked. They watched as two hunters returned to their camp. Wah bee goo nees' shook her head sadly. "The hunters were gone many days and still they return empty handed." Ah mah jee wayk' pointed toward the bushes and nodded in agreement. "Yes, all the game has fled and there are no berries left either." She held out her empty basket. "This is the third time the hunters returned with no meat."

Ah' nah kwuhd was worried about his people. Where could they get more food? He stared at the vast expanse of water near where they were camped. "I wonder what it's like over there?"

Wah bee goo nees' followed Ah' nah kwuhd to the water. She looked across at the green hills. "It must be very beautiful over there."

Wah bee goo nees' knelt down and looked at the empty bushes. "Not long ago berries grew here," she told Ah' nah kwuhd. "Now it's hard to keep my family fed on what we gather here. I worry that my husband and son grow hungry and weak."

Ah' nah kwuhd and Wah bee goo nees' sat down and thought about what to do. An elder of the tribe joined them. They talked about what to do and decided that a meeting should be called of all the people.

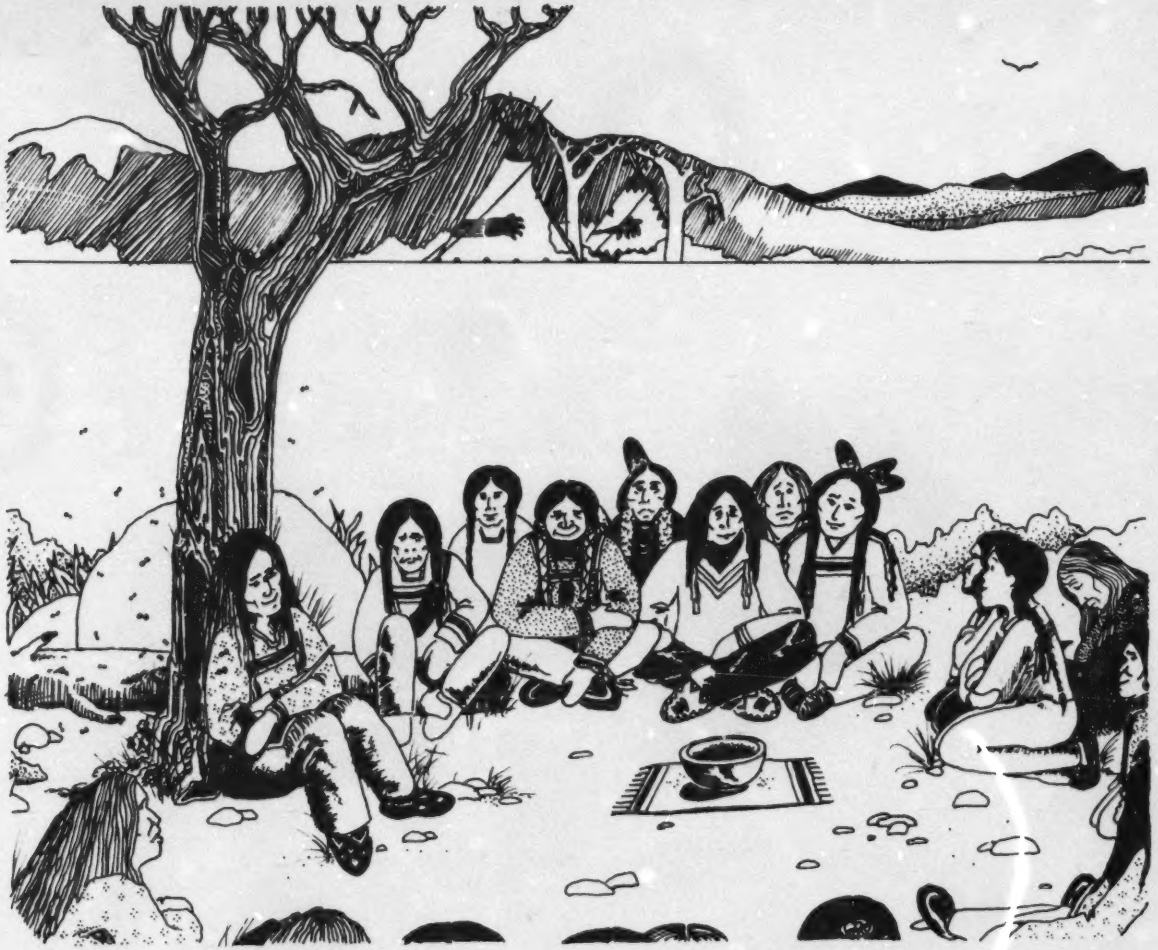
Ah' nah kwuhd went back to the camp and told everyone about the meeting. "Get all the people together. We are having an important meeting. It concerns everyone."

The men sat in a circle and discussed the lack of food in their area. Ah' nah kwuhd had an idea. "Someone must go across the lake to get game and food for our people. Here the berries are gone and the game is depleted. We must begin gathering food for the winter, too."

Many of the men agreed. "What he says is true. Our families are hungry and some of the children are weak and sick because there is no fresh food for them to eat."

Nah zhih keesh' kahng told the people he disagreed, and that going across the water was not a good idea. "This is a vast expanse of water. I tried to get to the far shore by walking first in one direction and then the other so as to walk around the water. But there seemed to be no end to how far it extended. There is no way to get across."

The people talked among themselves about the problem. "What can we do? We need food but we don't have any way to get across the water. Nah zhih keesh' kahng said it was dangerous to cross the water, but my family is hungry. I'm worried about my sister and her new baby not getting enough to eat."

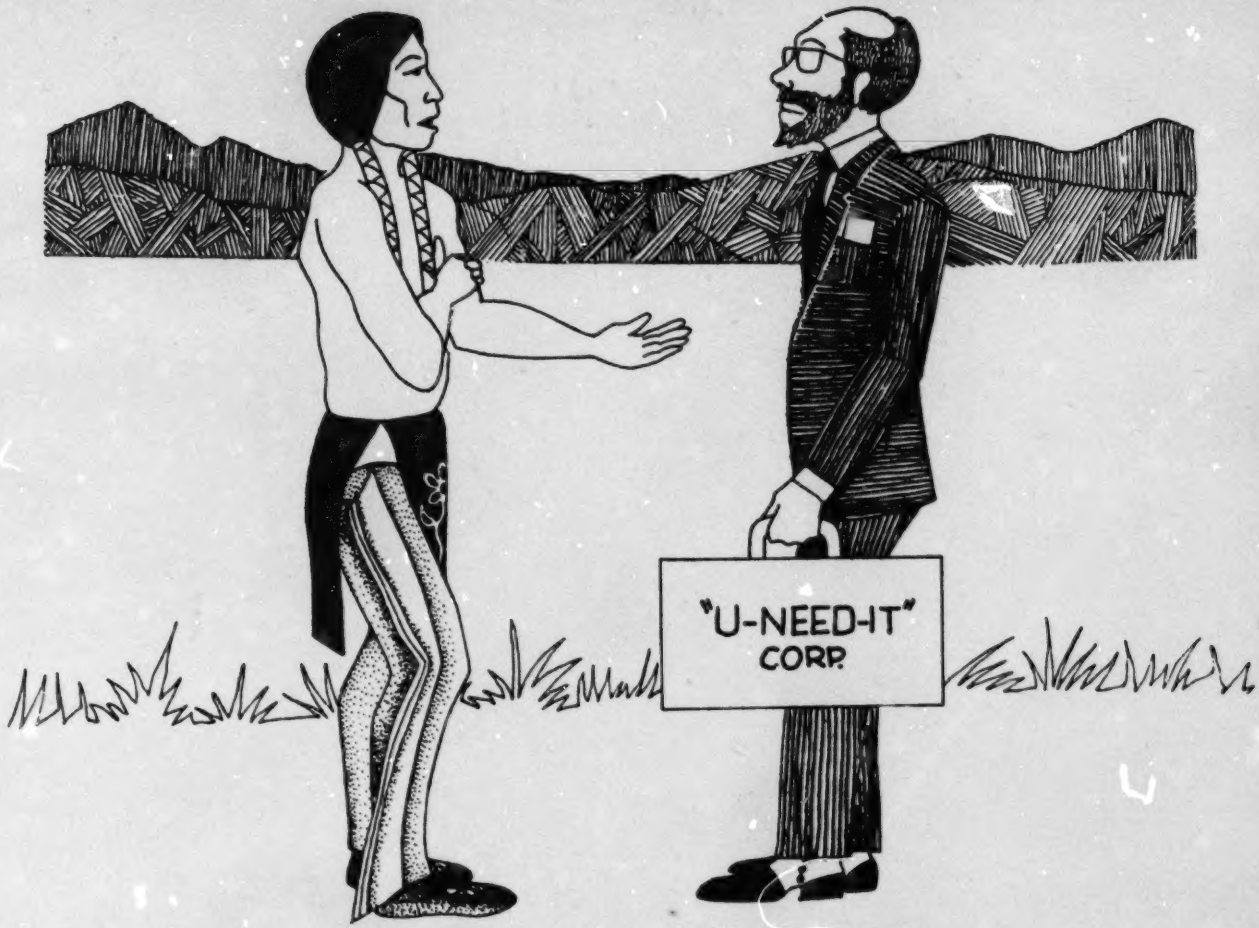


At the council meeting that day everyone voiced their own opinion. "We recognize the problem, let's do something about it." "I don't want anything to do with it." "Maybe he's right." "I don't think so." "It's not my problem." They talked a long time and decided to have a meeting of the entire community. Then everyone, even the children, could voice their own opinion. They would all decide together what to do.

Ah' nah kwuhd talked about holding a community meeting. "What questions and how many should we ask? How will we measure the answers? Don't forget that our tribe is different from other tribes. Let's find someone who knows how to find this kind of information. In this way, a needs assessment was beginning to take shape.

A man from outside the community came up and introduced himself. He didn't look anything like any of the people from the tribe. He wore a suit, eyeglasses, spats, and was carring a briefcase. "Hello," he said. "I'm an expert on needs assessments. What you need is the comprehensive-parabolic-non-measuring-voluminous needs assessment designed specifically for you by the U-NEED-IT Corporation of Eastchester, Mass. It is exactly what you need. I know this because I have been studying needs assessments for forty-eight years. I have a DDT in "Needs" and all it will cost is a great deal of time and money!"

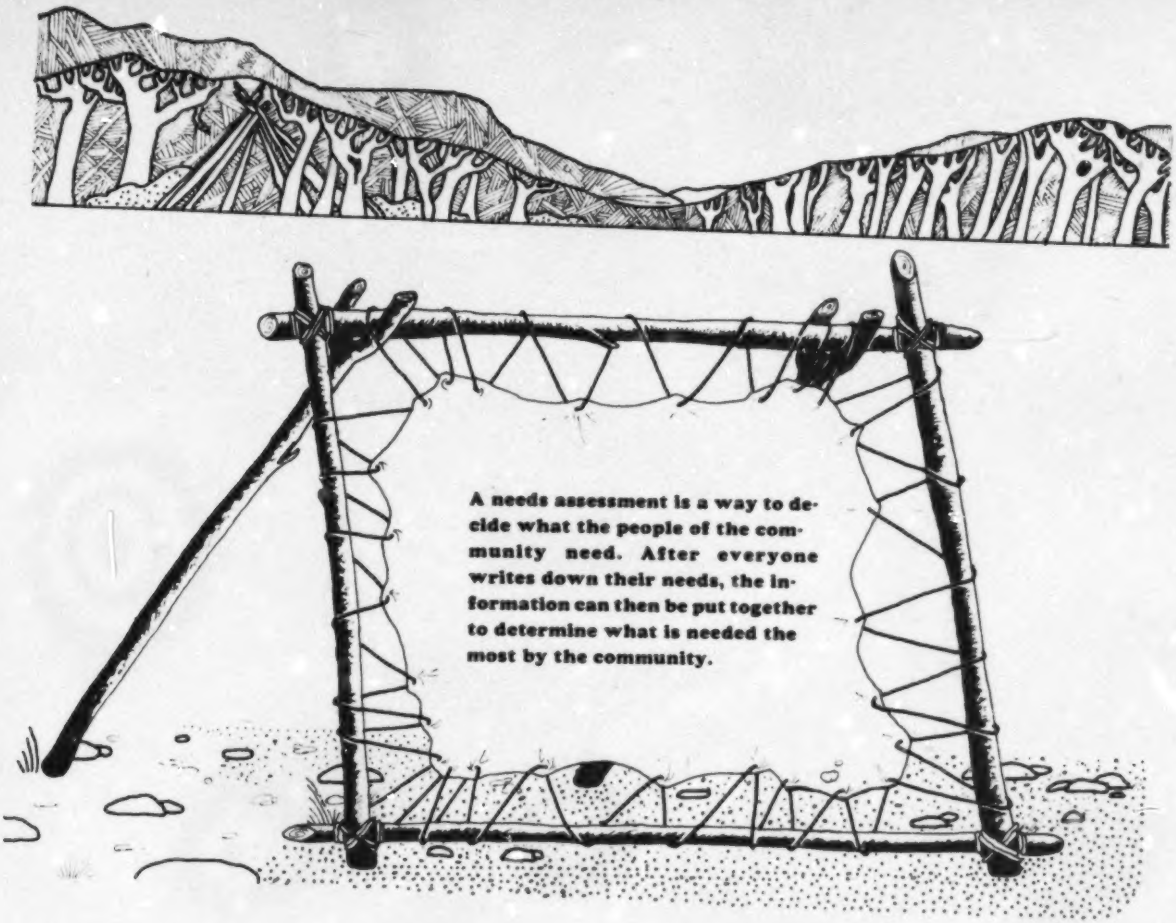
The people of the tribe looked at one another. What was this man talking about?



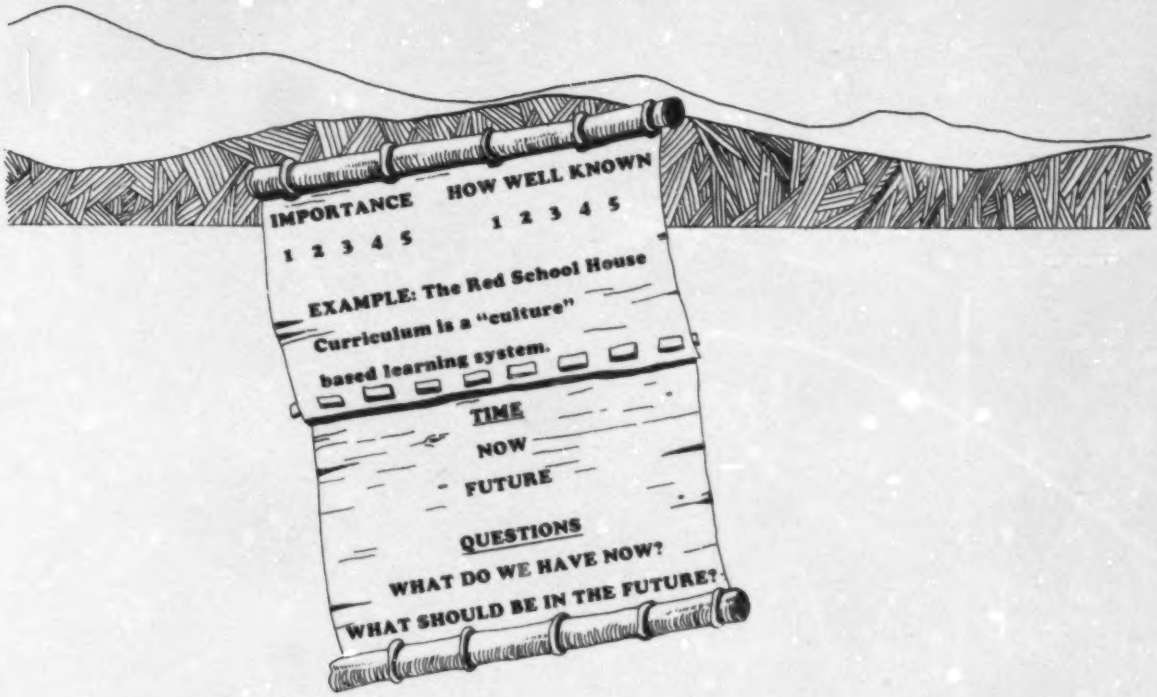
Ah' nah kwuhd spoke up. "Yes, there are quite a few different kinds of surveys and needs assessments we can use. But we should design one that will reflect the needs of our individual community. The way to do this is to have the people design it themselves. It should take into account the culture, values, customs and beliefs of the people it is designed for."

"Yes, but I can do this for you. I took a two week course on Indians and now I'm an Indian expert. They told us what you people need. We know what you need to run your lives. Like I said, all it takes is a little money."

The people all looked at him with disbelief. This was not someone they could trust with their needs.

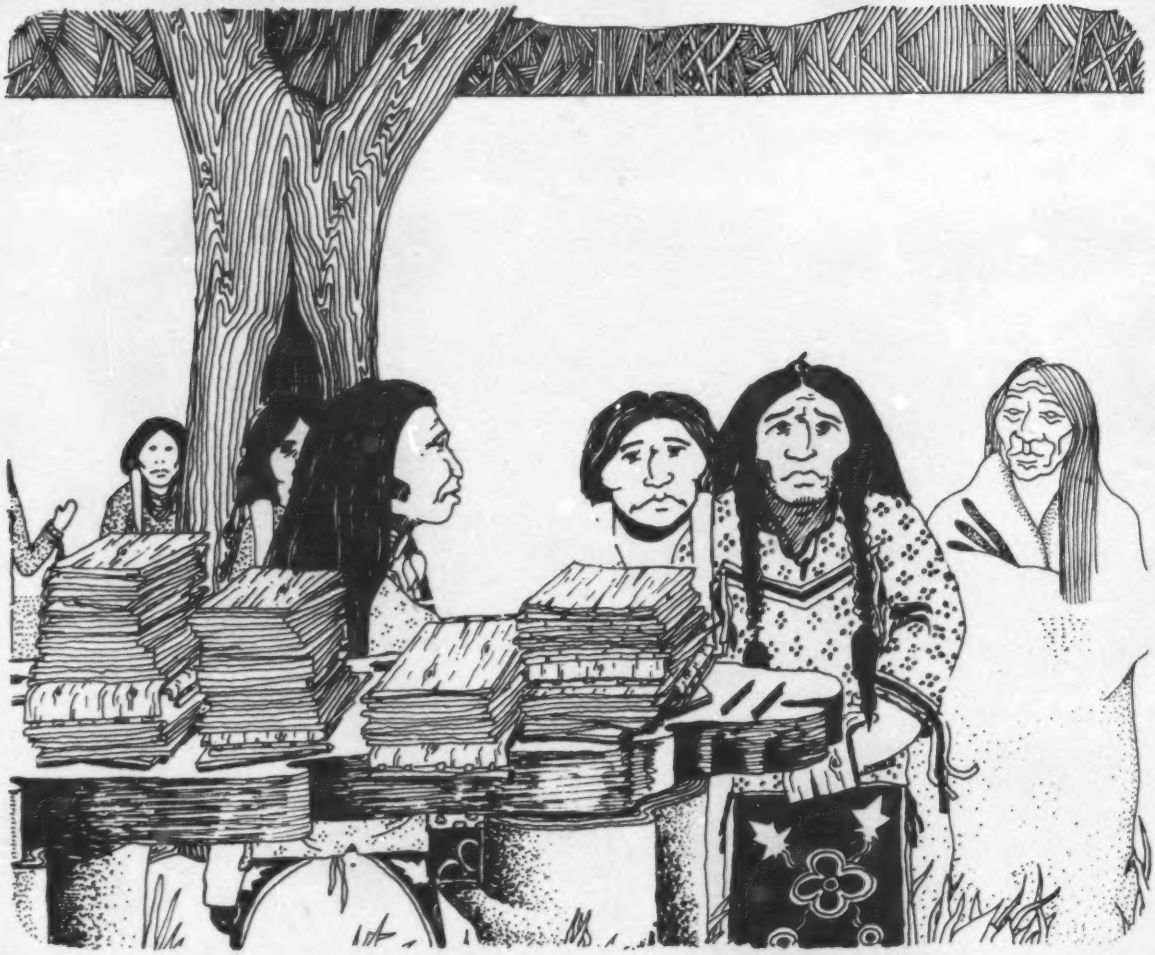


A needs assessment is a way to decide what the people of the community need. After everyone writes down their needs, the information can then be put together to determine what is needed the most by the community.

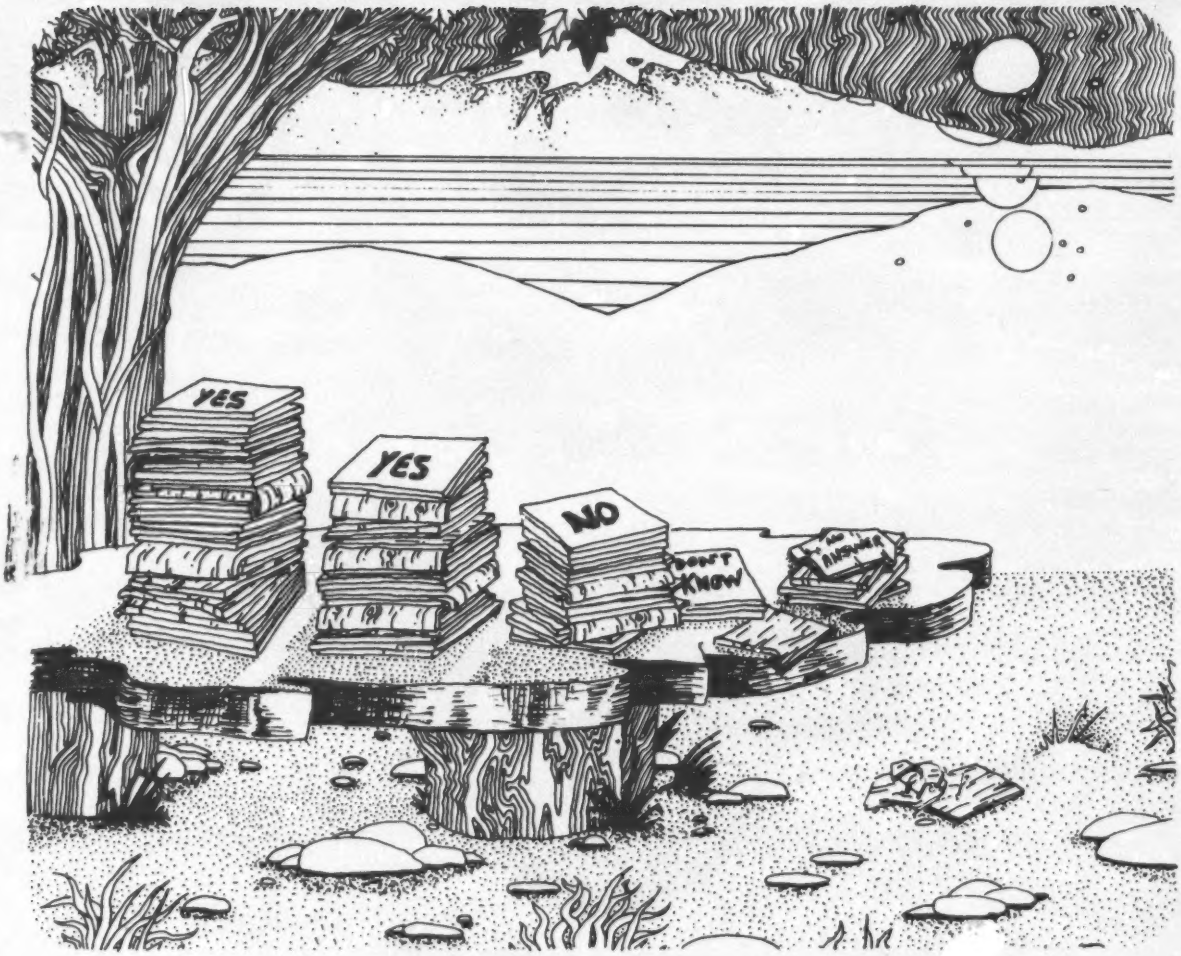


The questionnaire must be designed by and for the community it will serve to assess community needs.

Next we must pass around the questionnaire to all the people. We can take votes from everyone about what to do and they can write down their ideas.



After the people write down their ideas, someone must go around and gather the reponses.

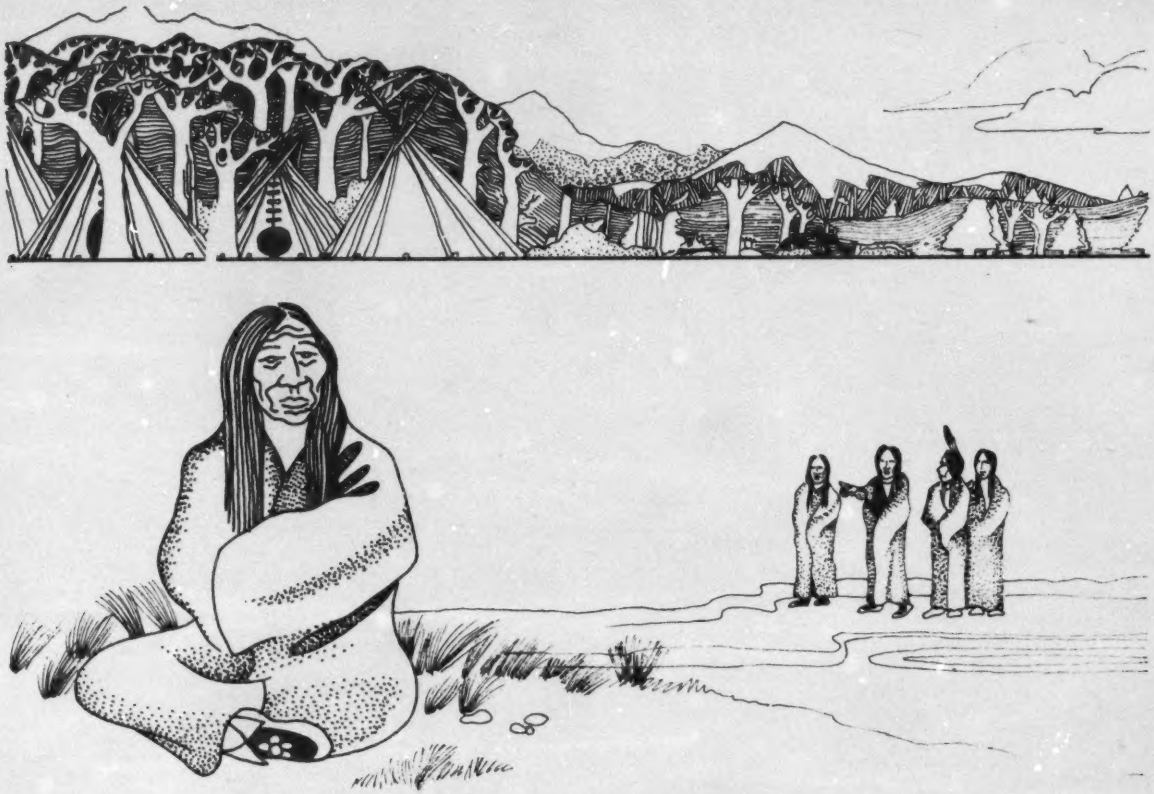


Then the responses must be divided up and counted.

After this is done, someone must communicate the results. When everyone was finished voting, 93% of the responses indicated that someone must travel to the other side of the lake. This is the first priority. "We must send someone across the lake to find out if the land will support us. We must find a way to travel across the lake."

The people discussed their needs and determined the objectives and goals. "The lake is too wide for swimming across. We can't wait for winter to walk across. We need food now, and the lake is too big to walk around. Besides that might take a long time. We must build a canoe. It's the quickest and most practical way to cross the lake."

"Now that we know what must be done," said Ah' nah kwuhd, "we have to figure out how to do it." So, the people all agreed it was time to act on the results they had obtained. They agreed to build a canoe, but it had not been done for such a long time. They had to find someone who knew how to do this.



The people realized there was someone in their own community with the skills and background necessary to help them. This is who they could turn to.

Indian Country Press
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St. Paul, Minnesota
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